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Transcript of an Audio-Recorded Conversation in Post-Conflict Rwanda

Participants:

- Uwayezu Dieu Domme **Relation:** Father
- Gota Issa **Relation:** Son

Facilitator: Kalisa Benon

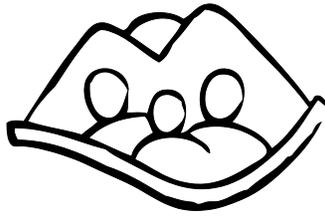
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Recording Location: Kigali

Story Number: SFH0048A (first story in recording)

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Uwayezu Dieu Domme & Gota Issa

Story Number: SFH0048A

Dieu Domme: My child, I want to talk to you concisely about the life of our country where we live. This is a country that has been characterized by good culture, but some Rwandese have suffered because of things that happened. Some Rwandese have been going through many hardships, but even though some went through many hardships they managed to remain alive. I would like to tell you how a good Rwandese should behave so that you may become a person able to achieve many things. The first thing that will help you is the good culture and the second is to think about your life. My child, you should try to do something that will benefit you in this country. This is a country that has educated us and we were born in this country. Our ancestors used to say: "Utaraganiriye na se ntamenya icyo sekuru yasize avuze," which means in its direct translation that a child who doesn't talk with his or her father can never know what was said by his or her grandfather. In this life you should try to do something that will make you earn a good living.

Issa: Thank you. I would like to ask you if there is a difference between the way people of long ago used to live and the way people live nowadays. Is there a difference?

Dieu Domme: My child, thank you for asking me such a question. Long ago, Rwandese used to respect each other. Children used to respect adults and adults used to respect children. My child, you should know this culture of respecting people who are older than you. You should do good things to all people because this is a culture of our ancestors.

Issa: It is said that before colonization there were no ethnicities. For example one would come from here and go to the Eastern province and would be received well without any problem. So why is it said that after the coming of white people ethnicities were found among Rwandese? Do you think that it will be possible to live like people of long ago, where there were no ethnicities among people?

A conversation between Uwayezu Dieu Domme and Gota Issa

Dieu Domme: Thank you for that question. This is the issue that brought a lot of trouble among the Rwandese. My child, that problem should be made a thing of the past. For those who went to school know that it is white people who brought ethnicities among Rwandese, but our ancestors did not face that problem. For example, one would go to remote areas and he or she would be well received without people knowing him or her. He or she was received as a Rwandese. People of long ago did not used to say: "This person is from Bugoyi, this person is from Bwanacyambwe." They did not discriminate; people used to receive others as Rwandese irrespective of where they came from. People used to do good things to others without taking into consideration those ethnicities brought by white people. I think that Rwandese will restore that culture when they try to get the positive elements that were embedded in the culture of long ago.

Issa: As you know, the youth is currently undergoing serious problems. Some young people were involved in mass killings that happened in 1994. For example, there are genocide perpetrators who were released because they were underage when they were committing crimes. So my question is this: Will we restore the good fellowship that characterized Rwandan society long ago?

Dieu Domme: There came a time in our country when people where not behaving like human beings. They could not even follow the behavior of their ancestors, who used to have fellowship among all Rwandese. At that time, people never gave each other pieces of advice that could shun evil. This is why we currently talk to you so that you may know the pieces of advice from your ancestors. It is better for you young people to talk to your fathers and people who are older than you so that they can tell you the history. This is because there came a time when our country entered darkness because parents were not giving pieces of advice to their children. Contrary to what happened before, now parents are talking to their children so that we all know the source of our conflicts. There are people who came and made us get mixed cultures in our country. Rwanda was influenced by external cultures at that time. We talk about the past in order to know the source of our conflicts. Before the colonial period in Rwanda, people had solidarity. For example, a person who had a cow would give milk to his or her neighbor who didn't have any. Children would not suffer from kwashiorkor (malnutrition). A Rwandese could not spend a night without eating because if he or she had no food, he or she could get it from neighbors. When there was a person who was attacked at night by unknown people, neighbors would come to rescue him or her from danger. Because of these talks, we will manage to restore the culture of our ancestors. Mutual help was a core characteristic of Rwandan culture.

Issa: I would like to ask you if there are ethnicities, namely Tutsi, Hutu, and Batwa. Do they exist or is that not true?

Dieu Domme: Rwanda of our ancestors was not characterized by ethnicities. Those ethnicities were not there. Every person was only identified as a Rwandan. Those

A conversation between Uwayezu Dieu Domme and Gota Issa

ethnics were brought by strong external influences. People could see a person and say, for example, that he is from this or that area; they couldn't identify a person by ethnicity. This came among Rwandese and I hope that it will go away, depending on the way we try to shun it. Whoever you are, you are a Rwandese irrespective of your ethnic background. Even Batwa are Rwandese, though they were stigmatized. They are not called people who have been left behind by history, but we should treat them as Rwandese. Now we have to be united irrespective of our ethnic background.

Facilitator: I would like to know if your father used to tell you such stories related to Rwandan history.

Dieu Domme: Yes, he used to tell us about that. After getting diner he used to talk to us in that way.

Facilitator: Why was he used to telling you such stories?

Dieu Domme: I think it is because he wanted to give us advice that could help us shun the evils that happened in our country. He could tell us bad things that happened and he could advise us not to do that.

Facilitator: You young person, what will you gain from this story?

Issa: The first gain is that this will help me have a bright future and this will also help me live in good terms with my colleagues. I will be able to live in good terms with those who committed crimes and even with those who were victims. I will be able to live in good terms with people I meet in different clubs and churches.

Facilitator: Why have you chosen to use this path of telling him the history of our country, whereas it is noticeable that our country has taken another direction without caring a lot about the past?

Dieu Domme: Normally I am used to talking with children and telling them the history of Rwanda of long ago. It was a country characterized by mutual help. I think it would be better to give today's children education about the culture of our ancestors. That education should be paired with the education they are currently getting from schools. I am used to telling my children stories so that they can build their future life even after I pass away.

Facilitator: When you tell your children these stories do you think that they remain stuck in their minds? As you know, children are flexible to social change and when a person has a problem he or she tries to remember what he or she was told by other people. Children are good at memorizing whatever you tell them. Is there a source of this braveness of telling children stories that could help them get a bright future? I can

A conversation between Uwayezu Dieu Domme and Gota Issa

see that you are interested in passing on your intelligence and thoughts to your children and all children in general, where did you get this braveness from?

Dieu Domme: I get this from the education I received from my parents. Our parents used to talk to us and advise us to do good things to other people. They would advise us to obey people, especially to obey people who are older than us. As you know, our parents had no formal education but they had a good culture that they got from their ancestors. So I also have to pass on this education to my children and I hope it will remain stuck in their minds and will help them in their future life.

Facilitator: While talking about remembering, you have reminded me of something. I would like to know what name you can give to this story so that it may be remembered by its name.

Dieu Domme: It is the history of our country. As you know, people of long ago used to do sacrifices. They would even accept to send their children to the battle. Even an old woman who could not go to battle could send her child to the battle instead and that woman was remembered because of his actions. I can name this story: "Urugamba rw'ibanze ni ukumenya amateka," which means in its direct translation: "The most important battle is to know history."

Facilitator: Is there a proverb related to this story to help this child remember this story in his future life?

Dieu Domme: I mentioned at the beginning of this talk that after drinking beer our ancestors used to say: "Utaganiriye na se ntamenya icyo sekuru yasize avuze," which means in its direct translation that one who does not talk with his or her father will never know what was said by his or her grandfather. If you don't talk to your parents you cannot have a good culture. Please, you should be close to us; we used to sit together with our parents and they would tell us many things related to the past. They used to tell us different stories and they would give us puzzles that needed answers and so forth.

Facilitator: You child, is there anything else you want to get from your parent or is there any other information you want to get from this parent before we put an end to this talk?

Issa: First and foremost I can say that I have learned from him. He told me about the past and even the current situation, but I do have a question. As a person who knows about the past and the current situation, how do you think that what happened will not happen again, because history tends to repeat itself?

Facilitator: What do you mean by saying so? What do we want to not happen again?

A conversation between Uwayezu Dieu Domme and Gota Issa

Issa: I mean the bad past history that happened and caused conflicts among young people, children killing each other and so forth. So I would like to know how you think that this will not occur again.

Dieu Domme: As you see, my child, we are growing old but I hope that what happened will not happen again. Rwandese are currently trying to copy the culture of our ancestors before the colonial period instead of copying the culture that was recently brought by western people. Before the colonial period, Rwandese used to socialize. Rich people used to brew beer and they would invite other people to come cultivate for them, and at the end they would share beer with them. Someone who had a house that was leaking would invite other people to come and help him put a new roof on his house. What I can tell you is that even though you are getting formal education, you should also restore the culture of our ancestors. This is what I can tell you.

Issa: There is currently something called Itorero (club) and it is said that our ancestors had Itorero and it was a group that one could go to in order to learn the culture of the country. It is even said that no one could be a soldier without having gone through Itorero. It is being said that the Rwandan culture will be restored by using Itorero because it was in Itorero in which all forms of education could be found.

Dieu Domme: What you are saying is correct. Even people of long ago who were considered heroes are people who had gone through the training of Itorero. I think it would also be better for you to go through Itorero in order to get education that will be added on to what I am telling you. The current Rwanda is trying to restore the past culture and eradicate the bad culture that caused genocide in order to prepare the good future of Rwandese. We are trying to restore a good culture that will treat all Rwandese equally irrespective of their origins. We should treat our nationals as Rwandese without caring about other things.

Facilitator: Thank you very much for this talk, I think that this child has learned from you.